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ABSTRACT

Traditionally, when an "outside evaluation" concerning a child's problems in school is sought by families, schools anticipate that the results will be reported in the context of an adversarial relationship, and their experiences have often borne out this expectation. A multidisciplinary Learning Evaluation Center (LEC) based within a university medical center has provided both an unusual setting for the observation of family-school dynamics, and a forum for developing a non-adversarial family-school process. The LEC uses an interdisciplinary approach and operates within a pediatrics department which makes many valuable clinical assets available if needed. The comprehensive evaluation proceeds in several steps. It begins with the systematic collection of information prior to the first appointment. The next step involves direct observation of the child in school, and direct interaction with the teacher, including him/her as a participant in the process. The basic evaluation of the child includes a clinical interview, neurological examination, psychological and psycho-educational assessments, and audiological testing and vision screening. By the time of the conference with the family, there is an unusually rich fund of information concerning the child, the school and the family, and this material has been integrated by the team. By gathering information and sharing results in a non-adversarial way bridges are built with the school and the child is served, not only by the information gathered and shared, but by the basis laid for future family-school communication. (ABL)

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**FOSTERING NON-ADVERSARIAL FAMILY/SCHOOL RELATIONSHIPS
THROUGH THE EVALUATION PROCESS**

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Presented at the 99th annual Convention of the American Psychological Association,
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Abstract

Traditionally, when an "outside Evaluation" is sought by families, schools anticipate that the results will be reported in the context of an adversarial relationship - and their experience has often borne out this expectation. A multidisciplinary Learning Evaluation Center (LEC) based within a University Medical Center has provided both an unusual setting for the observation of family-school dynamics, and a forum for developing a non-adversarial family-school process.

Often, at the beginning of the evaluation, there has been apprehension, but the process has usually overcome this initial unease. The process of comprehensive evaluation includes the extensive gathering of information, giving each party the opportunity to make a contribution to and to be part of the process from the beginning. Within the context of data gathering, the process itself serves to build trust among all those concerned with the outcome.

By the time center staff meet with family and school to share results and recommendations, and to consult with the school on the best ways to work in the interests of the child, there are usually mutual feelings of satisfaction. It is the process of building trust while moving toward the shared goal - meeting the needs of the individual child - that enables family, school and "outside evaluator" to work together cooperatively, and fosters a non-adversarial atmosphere.

This poster describes the process of the evaluation in the multidisciplinary university setting, focusing on the building of trust through the comprehensive nature of the evaluation, the integrative nature of the recommendations, the meaning of the family conference as part of the process, and the building of bridges to form the basis of future family-school communication. Characteristics of children, their schools and referral sources describe the range served.

Presented at the 99th Annual Convention of the American Psychological Association, San Francisco, California - August, 1991

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Introduction

Traditionally, when an "Outside Evaluation" is sought by families, schools anticipate that the results will be reported in the context of an adversarial relationship - and their experience has often borne out this expectation. A university based Learning Evaluation Center has found that although apprehension often exists at the beginning, the process of comprehensive evaluation usually results in satisfaction on the part of school personnel when center staff meet with them and the family to share results and recommendations, and to consult with them on the best ways to work in the interests of the child. It is this goal - meeting the needs of the individual child - which enables family, school and "outside evaluator" to work together cooperatively, and fosters a non-adversarial atmosphere.

This presentation describes the process of evaluation in the multidisciplinary university setting, focuses on the building of trust throughout the process, and emphasizes the comprehensive nature of the evaluation and the integrative nature of the recommendations.

The University Setting

The Loyola University Center for Children and Families is a university-based program committed to an interdisciplinary approach, and includes a Department of Psychology, and Schools of Education, Medicine, and Social Work. Through its operation of a Learning Evaluation Center (LEC), it provides an excellent setting for observing family-school dynamics, and also provides a forum for the development of non-adversarial family-school relationships.

The LEC operates in the Pediatrics Department of the University Medical Center; this environment makes many valuable clinical assets available, if needed.

In addition to providing services for families seeking help for their children's problems, the LEC provides training opportunities for students in school psychology, neuropsychology, social work, and developmental and clinical psychology, as well as residents in child psychiatry and pediatrics. Additional evaluation opportunities are also available through the Center's research projects; here experts in neuropsychology and neurophysiology take a deeper look not available through more traditional means.

As part of its educational services, a monthly Seminar Series is presented annually by the LEC at the Medical Center. The series provides the opportunity to hear University Faculty speak on current issues of broad interest, for example, "Attention Deficit Disorder," or "Neuropsychological Perspectives on Learning Disabilities." This series serves not only as a continuing education resource for school personnel, other interested professionals, and families, but also serves to de-mystify the LEC - it is seen as "User Friendly."

Evaluation Process

The comprehensive evaluation proceeds in several steps. It begins with the systematic collection of information prior to the first appointment, including telephone contact with family and school, the return of questionnaires filled out by family and school, and the gathering of medical, psychological and other available reports. The next step involves direct observation of the child in school, and direct interaction with the teacher, including her as a participant in the process. These first steps are crucial to Trust Building - the basic ingredient in the non-adversarial process.

At the first of at least two clinic appointments, a clinical interview with the family provides additional family, developmental, medical and school history. The basic evaluation of the child includes a clinical interview, neurological examination, psychological and psycho-educational assessments, and audiological testing and vision screening. The LEC school psychologist is familiar with the Case Study Evaluation and Multidisciplinary Conference processes, takes care not to repeat or foreclose use of testing instruments used by the school, and by sharing a school perspective, helps to remove barriers.

Because the team exchanges information throughout the process, decisions to include additional assessments, such as Speech and Language, or Sensory Motor-Physical Therapy, and other medical evaluations, such as additional neurological studies, are undertaken before the evaluation is completed. A multidisciplinary conference, where all members of the assessment team meet and work to put together findings and recommendations follows the collection of data. The integration of the data at this point gives both depth and breadth to the recommendations. These may be as diverse as the child's participation in a drama class, specific teaching strategies or special class placement, and family and/or individual therapy.

Post Assessment Process

By the time of the conference with the family, there is an unusually rich fund of information concerning the child, the school and the family, and this material has been integrated by the team. The family conference itself often provides the opportunity to add dimensions to the developing picture of the nature of the child's

problems; family and professionals together may supplement and make realistic plans to implement recommendations, for the family as well as for the school. The family responses help to develop a picture of family and school and their dynamics around the issues of the child. It is this focus which continues to inform the advocacy relationship.

When center-staff and family meet with school personnel, it is for mutual sharing of information, results and recommendations, and for consultation on the best ways to work in the interests of the child. It is this goal, - meeting the needs of the individual child - which enables family, school and "outside evaluator" to work together cooperatively, and which fosters an atmosphere of trust and open communication.

In addition, and perhaps most important, by gathering information and sharing results in a non-adversarial way, bridges are built with the school, and the child is served, not only by the information gathered and shared, but by the basis laid for future family-school communication. The building of trust among family-center-school has been an ongoing strength of the LEC.

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